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**The First Ladies of the United States and Russia**

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# Introduction

The term ‘First Lady’ is the official title used for the wife of the President of the United States. It is also used in the USA to refer to wives of governors and, less formally, to wives of college and university presidents and even to female spouses of men who are chairmen of major corporations. This term is used unofficially in other countries to refer to the wife or hostess of a non-monarchical head of state or chief executive. In Russia it is an unofficial title for the wife of the President of the Russian Federation.

In this research I would like to describe and compare the first ladies of the USA and Russia. I hope you will enjoy reading it.

Who was originally a Broadway actress before becoming the first lady? Which first lady became a senator and then secretary of state? Who was the first among the first ladies to keep her social networking page? Here are the answers to these questions.

# Jackie Kennedy and Nina Khrushcheva

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|  | *‘I think the major role of the First Lady is to take care of the President so that he can best serve the people, and not to fail her family, her husband and her children.’*  *Jackie Kennedy* |

Jacqueline Lee ‘Jackie’ (Bouvier) Kennedy Onassis, the wife of the 35th President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, and Nina Petrovna Khrushcheva (Kukhnarchuk), the wife of the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, looked very different, and at the first glimpse it was very hard to say that they had something in common. At some point I understand those who think that there weren’t many similarities between them. Jackie’s father, John "Jack" Vernou Bouvier, III, was a successful stockbroker on Wall Street. Nina Petrovna’s parents were peasants from the village in Ukraine. Jackie Kennedy was beautiful and very elegant, and she is still universally held up as an ideal when it comes to the fashions of First Ladies. Nina Petrovna looked provincial, and her public appearance in the U.S. was heavily criticized by American reporters for ‘poorly corseted figure, undistinguished wardrobe and placid peasant face’. But being very different in their looks and ancestry, these two first ladies were similar in some other very important aspects.

Jackie Kennedy had very good education – she went to the best of private schools and then studied in Vassar College and George Washington University. After college she got a job in *Washington Times-Herald* as its ‘Inquiring Camera Girl’ and was a successful journalist. Jackie was proficient in foreign languages - French, Spanish, Italian and Polish. Nina Khrushcheva was also well educated. She worked as a teacher and then as a propagandist during the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War and was very upset when she had to give up her job in the 1930s because that was the requirement of Stalin who wanted to return women back to the family. Besides Russian and Ukrainian, Nina Khrushcheva spoke Polish, French and English, which she studied for many years in Communist Party Schools. Nina Khrushcheva was the first wife of a Soviet political leader to have a typical First Lady role. She travelled with Nikita Khrushchev on various diplomatic tours to foreign countries, and though she didn’t look fashionable, her charming manners eventually won over the public.

Besides accompanying Nikita Khrushchev in various official events abroad, Nina Khrushcheva was also de facto the manager of Khrushchev’s private life. Jackie Kennedy did the same. She thought that one of her main roles was to ‘take care of the President’ and their children. Jackie ones said: ‘if you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do well matters very much.’ She was first and foremost family friendly. Moreover, Jackie had made an icon of her home. She organized a restoration of the White House and, being one of the most stylish women of her generation, she made it a family residence of elegance and charm. The new interiors of the White House were then presented in the film ‘A tour of the White House’, for which she got the Emmy.

Both Jackie Kennedy and Nina Khrushcheva supported their husbands during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Jackie remained at the President’s side all that time, translating memos and assisting with various issues. Nina Petrovna made several speeches (in English), including the most famous ‘address to the women of America’ where she urged the United States to end the cold war.

I also would like to note that these two first ladies were very strong women. They both had to go through very difficult circumstances, and being in these awful situations, they showed great characters, especially Jackie, whose courage during the tragedy of her husband’s assassination made her a symbol of strength for the American nation.

Having done the research on Jackie Kennedy and Nina Khrushcheva, I still remain the admirer of Jackie, but I also think that Nina Petrovna Khrushcheva was a very interesting and nice person.

# Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbacheva

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|  | *‘My life really began when I married  my husband.’*  *Nancy Reagan* |

Nancy Davis Reagan, the wife of Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States, and Raisa Maksimovna Gorbacheva (Titarenko), the wife of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, could hardly bear each other. Nevertheless they had a lot in common.

They both had very interesting jobs before serving as first ladies. Nancy Reagan was a professional actress. She had roles on Broadway and then got offers from Hollywood where she performed in 11 films from 1949 to 1956. Raisa Gorbacheva was a research scientist and a lector and then a professor in Lomonosov Moscow State University. But they both thought that being a wife and a mother is much more important than being a highly professional specialist. ‘I loved the work, although it was a lot less glamorous than people think,’ Nancy Reagan once said. She also told why she made the choices she did during her life: ‘I was never really a career woman but only because I hadn’t found the man I wanted to marry. I couldn’t sit around and do nothing, so I became an actress.’

Both Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbacheva were attractive and elegant women. Their public appearances drew attention of millions of people.

Raisa Gorbacheva and Nancy Reagan did a lot to support various charity and cultural projects. Nancy Reagan launched the program ‘Just say no’, aimed to fight against drug and alcohol abuse among young people. She visited prevention and rehabilitation centers, and in 1985 she held a conference at the White House for First Ladies of 17 countries to focus international attention on this problem. Raisa Gorbacheva committed herself to combating children’s leukemia. She patronized the association ‘Hematologists of the World – for the Children’ and Moscow’s Central Children’s Hospital. Nancy Reagan had a deep interest in arts and she used the White House as a showcase for talented young musicians and singers in the television series ‘In Performance at the White House.’ Raisa Gorbacheva (along with Academician Dmitry Likhachev and other prominent cultural figures) established the Russian Cultural Foundation which she co-chaired. During her presidency of this Foundation the Soviet Union received more than 50 thousand items of Russian emigre archives and periodical editions, priceless objects and works of arts that had been taken out of Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution.

It should be also noted that both Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbacheva were claimed to have a great influence on their husbands. Raisa Gorbacheva was called by journalists ‘the Kremlin’s secret weapon’ and everyone knew that Nancy was the most trusted and important adviser to Ronal Reagan.

As for the differences between these two first ladies, they were connected with cultural aspects. For example, while visiting the White House, Raisa Gorbacheva mentioned: ‘I would say that humanly speaking, a human being would like to live in a regular house. This is like a museum.’ Nancy Reagan was hardly happy with it. In fact, she even wrote about it in her memoir: ‘It wasn't a very polite answer, especially from somebody who hadn't even seen the private living quarters!’ This situation shows how different Russians and Americans are. Americans expect their guests to be polite, and Russians feel free to be as honest as they can.

# Hillary Clinton and Naina Yeltsina

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| *‘Donald Trump always used to say, ‘Oh, what have you been doing for 30 years?’ And I always found out that kind of odd because you could Google it and find out. And, you know, I’ve been a lawyer and I’ve been a First Lady and I’ve been a senator and I’ve been secretary of State.’*  *Hillary Clinton* |  |

# Hillary (Rodham) Clinton, the First Lady of the United States to the 42nd President, Bill Clinton, and Naina Yetlsina (Girina), the widow of Boris Yeltsin, the first President of the Russian Federation, don’t have much in common. Nevertheless they managed to build very good relationship.

# Hillary Clinton was a very active first lady. Her active role began in 1993 when the President asked her to chair the Committee on National Health Care Reform. She was a leading advocate for expanding health insurance coverage and raising public awareness of health issues. She initiated the Adoption Reform. She wrote a weekly newspaper column, published books, and once received a Grammy Award for recording one of them. Hillary was also the advisor to the President and accompanied him on his numerous tours to Africa, Asia, South America and Central European countries. Naina Yeltsina didn’t take part in her husband’s political life, and she was rarely seen in public. Her public appearances were mainly connected with her husband’s foreign visits and his election campaigns.

# Being very busy with her numerous projects, Hillary was always trying to find a balance between her public service and private life. She once said: ‘Our lives are a mixture of different roles. Most of us are doing the best we can to find whatever the right balance is . . . For me, that balance is family, work, and service.’ I like this idea.

By assuming a more political role of a First Lady, Hillary Clinton became a target for the political opposition and others who disagreed with the Administration. She was heavily criticized and found herself implicated in numerous investigations. Unlike Hillary, Naina Yeltsina was never involved in any political disputes while being a first lady.

Hillary Clinton was elected a U.S. Senator on November 7, 2000. From 2009 to 2013 she served as a U.S. Secretary of State. In 2016 she was nominated for the American presidency. She is the first First Lady who managed to do this.

# Michelle Obama and Svetlana Medvedeva

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|  | *‘Being a First Lady is a full-time job.’*  *Michelle Obama* |

Michelle (Robinson) Obama, the wife of Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, and Svetlana Medvedeva (Linnik), the wife of Dmitry Medvedev, the 3rd President of the Russian Federation, are like each other in some things. They both have known their husbands for a long period of time. Michelle met Barack Obama while they were working in Chicago law firm ‘Sidley & Austin’ which she joined after graduating from Harvard University in 1988. Svetlana met her future husband in secondary school. They both have higher education. Michelle is a lawyer and Svetlana is an economist. They both are happy mothers and consistent defenders of family values. Also, being first ladies they both showed very elegant styles in their clothing choices.

Speaking about differences between these two first ladies, I would like to note that Michelle Obama was much more active First Lady than Svetlana Medvedeva. During her time as First Lady she did a lot to support young people and families of those who served in the Army. She launched the project ‘Let’s Move’ that had an ambitious goal - to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity. Supporting this project, she’s done a lot to promote ‘healthy eating’ and ‘kids’ exercising’. Then she launched ‘Joining Forces’, a nationwide initiative calling all Americans to help Army service members, veterans, and their families to support them through education and employment opportunities. She also launched the ‘Reach Higher Initiative’, focused to support students and high school counselors, and then joined the project ‘Let Girls Learn’, a U.S. government program that helps girls around the world go to school and stay in school. Unlike Michelle Obama, Svetlana Medvedeva was not often involved in projects like these. I can name only one of them - the initiative for the institution of Family Day that has been celebrated in Russia on the 8th of July since 2008.

Michelle Obama has been a very social media savvy and she’s had a massive following on Twitter, Instagram and even Snapchat. She was the first First Lady who started using social networks. Svetlana Medvedeva doesn’t like any publicity. She rarely gives interviews and tries to avoid photos.

Michelle Obama was the first African-American First Lady of the United States. She is extremely popular among women in her country, and for many of them she is a role model.

# Melania Trump

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| *‘Nothing lasts forever, so live it up, drink it down, laugh it off, avoid the drama and never have regrets. Because at one point everything you did was exactly what you wanted’.*  *Melania Trump* |  |

Melania Trump (earlier Melanija Knavs), the wife of the Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, was born in Slovenia (the former part of Yugoslavia). Her father was a car dealer and her mother was a designer of children’s clothing. At the age of 16 she began modeling and later worked in Paris and Milan and then in 1996 moved to New York. She would have a degree at the University of Ljubljana but paused her studies in order to continue her modeling career. Besides Slovenian and English, Melania speaks French, Italian and German. As a model, she was quite successful, working with top photographers in the fashion industry, including Patrick Demarchelier, Helmut Newton and Mario Testino. She appeared on the covers of Vogue, Harper’s Bazar, British GQ, In Style and New York Magazine. Her major layouts include the Sports Illustrated, Vogue, Self, Glamour, Vanity Fair and Elle. She has also appeared in numerous television commercials and television programs.

Melania Trump took part in some charity projects. From 2005 to 2009 she was Goodwill Ambassador of The American Red Cross, and in 2011 she was the Chairwoman for The American Heart Association which raised $ 1.7 Million for research.

Melania met her future husband Donald Trump at a New York Fashion Party in 1998. Although she first refused to date him, the couple eventually began establishing their relationship and married in 2005. The following year Melania gave birth to Barron William Trump, a first son for her and the fifth child for Donald Trump. The same year she also became a citizen of the USA. She is only the second First Lady born outside of the United States.

Like Michelle Obama, Melania is an active user of social networks now. She has got accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Recently she has said that as the first lady she would take on combating cyberbullying and harassment as her main cause. ‘We have to find a better way to talk to each other, disagree with each other, to respect each other’, she said at one of the interviews. ‘We must find better ways to honor and support the basic goodness of our children, especially in social media’.

I think it will be very interesting to see how she takes on her the role of a Fist Lady and makes it her own during the next four years.

# Conclusion

The first ladies of the USA and Russia are very different. It can be explained by different cultures and different attitudes to the role of a First Lady. First of all, I would like to say that the status of the first lady in America is much more important than in Russia. The first lady of the USA is not just a hostess of the White House, who performs ceremonial duties. She also works on different social projects, like the issues of education, women’s equality, health initiatives, African-American civil rights or historical preservation of architectural treasures. It’s a central figure in a national context, a symbol of a modern woman that can be an equal participant in the political process.

Contrary to the highly important role of a First Lady in America, the role of a First Lady in Russia is restricted by some unspoken rules. First of all, it’s not public. I think that Russian first ladies are more reserved. They try to keep their privacy and don’t participate in their husbands’ political life.

Unlike Russian first ladies, their American counterparts show much more openness. People in America know a lot about their first ladies – their work (public appearances, initiatives and projects), as well as their leisure activities, hobbies and interests, especially now, when social networking is widely spread. I like this most of all in the American first ladies. I should also admit that the American first ladies look more attractive, stylish and classy than their Russian counterparts, and they traditionally pay for their designer clothes (which they are expected to wear) and for their stylists out of pocket.

Speaking about the things that I don’t like in the American first ladies, I should note that they seem to me more powerful in everything, especially in their families. Russian first ladies seem to be less powerful, and I have a feeling that they enjoy forming good relationships.

To sum up, I would like to say that being a first lady is a very hard (unpaid) job that requires dignity, charisma and total dedication. First Ladies often have cameras of the world on them and at these moments they feel pressure to be as perfect as they can because they are representatives of their countries. I think that they are really extraordinary women, both American and Russian.

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